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SUBJECT: RUSSIA TRANSFERS AKHALKALAKI MILITARY BASE TO  
GEORGIA

REF: TBILISI 992

¶1. On June 27 Russia officially handed over its military base in Akhalkalaki to Georgia, several days ahead of schedule. Georgian First Deputy Defense Minister Levan Nikoleishvili and Russian Commander of the Group of Russian Forces in the Transcaucasus Andrei Popov attended the handover ceremony and signed the Act of Handover and Acceptance. The closure and transfer of the base, which was built by Russia in 1910 and occupied by Russian and Soviet forces since that time, began in 2006, following a March 31 agreement between Georgia and Russia on the withdrawal of the remaining Russian forces stationed in Georgia. (Comment: The Georgian Ministry of Defense has not yet made clear its plans for the base, though it is unlikely that they will station troops there. End comment).

¶2. Russian withdrawal from its base in Batumi, the last remaining base on Georgian-government controlled territory, also continues ahead of schedule. On June 28, the seventh trainload of heavy equipment departed Batumi for Russia. The remaining six trainloads of heavy equipment will be removed from Batumi by August 23, 2007. The remaining troops and equipment will begin withdrawal in the spring of 2008, and the base will be transferred to Georgia by October 1, 2008. The status of the Russian base at Gudauta, in the breakaway republic of Abkhazia, remains an issue, and the Georgian government has made clear that it will not consider Russia's obligations under the 1999 Istanbul Commitments fulfilled until Gudauta's status is resolved (reftel).  
TEFFT